

Anger

Anger Management

Anger: a feeling of displeasure or discomfort resulting from injury, mistreatment, opposition, and usually showing itself in a desire to fight back at the supposed cause of this feeling. (Webster's New World Dictionary)

Most of us experience countless similar situations on a daily basis. They are inescapable "facts of life" and they have the potential for triggering an angry response from mild annoyance to furious rage. Over time chronic hostility may develop into a daily pattern of behaving. Thus, it is likely that how we deal or don't deal with our anger can impact how we feel about ourselves and how we relate to others. What follows is an attempt to better understand anger and offer ways to improve our mastery over it.

Research About Anger:

Difficulty dealing with anger is at least a contributing, if not primary, factor in cardiovascular disease, obesity, low self-esteem, migraine headache, poor interpersonal relationships, and spouse and child abuse.

Hostility unresolved in both men and women predict more severe coronary arteriosclerosis and higher death rates. Hostility can magnify the impact of blood cholesterol, thereby making a high cholesterol level even worse for a hostile person.

For people who exhibit type A behavior (those who are tense, driven, competitive, and hostile) only hostility is the key predictor of coronary disease.

Is All Anger Bad?

Definitely not. Feeling angry can serve a number of useful purposes, depending on how we deal with it.

Anger is an energizer or motivator. It gives us vigor, mobilizes the body's resources for self-defense and provides us with stamina to overcome obstacles and achieve goals.

Anger gives us information about people and situations; it serves as a cue to tell us that something unjust, frustrating, threatening, or annoying is going on. It can be a signal that tells us it is time to do something about our discomfort.

The effect of chronic anger is the same as flooring the accelerator of your car at the same time you are slamming on the brakes.

In general, anger becomes negative and is a problem when:

It overrides our good judgment and causes us to say or do things without regard for consequences to ourselves or others

Is too frequent

Is too intense

Lasts too long

Lends to aggression

Disrupts work or relationships

Contributes to health problems

Do's & Don'ts When You Are Feeling Angry

Do speak up when an issue is important to you.

“Don't strike while the iron is hot.”

Do take time out to think about the issue and to clarify your position.

Don't use “below the belt” tactics (blaming, interpreting, analyzing, preaching, or ridiculing).

Don't make vague statements or requests, people can't read your mind.

Do try to avoid speaking through a third party, at least initially.

Do take responsibility for your own part in creating or maintaining the situation that evokes your anger.

Do listen. If someone is angry with you, listen to what they are saying.

Do apologize. Say you're sorry, at least for your part in the conflict.

Do choose to forgive yourself when you slip into old patterns; learn from your experience and get back on track.

Specific Strategies Proven to Work

Study yourself. Become an expert on your own anger. Determine what triggers your anger; are you angry a lot of the time?, how does it affect you emotionally, physically, socially and the quality of your life?, is it time for a change?

Experiment with alternative ways of reacting. One source of possible ideas is to find a role model – a person who handles disappointment or frustration more constructively – and practice doing the same.

Cool down. Take a few deep breaths, go for a walk, close your eyes briefly. This gives yourself the opportunity to relax in the face of anger and can free you up to better determine what else, if necessary, might help to cope better.

Change how you think. Look at your thoughts, attitudes, and expectations that contribute to your anger. Is your boss deliberately and unfairly targeting you with a lot of extra work or might it be a “crunch period” and he/she knows you can be counted on to do a good job? Viewing people or situations more realistically and less personally can prevent you from being angry in the first place.

Address the situation directly. Identify what is really distressing to you and express your reactions in a non-defensive straightforward way to the person involved.

Learn from your experience. As you test out new ways of preventing or dealing with your anger, determine what works by asking yourself, “Am I reacting differently now? Am I less angry than I used to be? Do I feel better about myself? Are people noticing and commenting on how much more enjoyable it is to be around me?” If the answers are “yes”, then keep it up. If the answers are “no”, then keep experimenting. What have you got to lose?

If, in spite of your best efforts, you find yourself unable to improve your mastery over anger, you may wish to consider counseling. In some cases, anger is a sign of an underlying condition that may need to be resolved. The counseling staff would be a good resource to find out more about what can be most helpful. If you would like more assistance or counseling, please contact your school counselor.

Coping With Anger

Anger is probably the most poorly handled emotion in our society. From time to time we all experience this very powerful feeling. Some of the common causes of anger include frustration, hurt, annoyance, disappointment, harassment and threats. It is helpful to realize that anger can be our friend or foe, depending on how we express it. Knowing how to recognize and express it appropriately can help us to reach goals, handle emergencies, solve problems and even protect our health. However, failure to recognize and understand our anger may lead to a variety of problems.

12-Step Program

Some experts believe that suppressed anger is an underlying cause of both anxiety and depression. Anger that is not expressed can disrupt relationships, affect thinking and behavior patterns, and create a variety of physical problems, such as high blood pressure, heart problems, headaches, skin disorders, and digestive problems. What's even worse is the correlation between the dangers of uncontrolled anger and crime, emotional and physical abuse, and other violent behavior. Redford Williams, an internist and behavioral specialist at Duke University Medical Center has developed a 12-step program that can help people learn to deal with their angry emotions:

1. Williams suggests monitoring your cynical thoughts by maintaining a "hostility log." This will teach you about the frequency and kinds of situations that provoke you.
2. Acknowledge any problems in coping with anger.
3. Seek the support of important people in your life in coping with your feelings and in changing your behavior patterns.
4. By keeping your hostility log you are able to realize when and where you are having aggressive thoughts, so that when you find yourself in these situations, you can utilize such techniques as deep breathing, positive self-talk, or thought stopping, which can help you interrupt the anger cycle.
5. Put yourself in the other person's shoes. This will help you gain a different perspective. Keep in mind that we are all humans, subject to making mistakes.
6. Learn how to laugh at yourself and see humor in situations.
7. Learn how to relax. Although you may have heard that expressing anger is better than keeping it in, remember that frequent outbursts of anger are often counter-productive and may alienate others.

8. *It is also important that you practice trusting other people. It's usually easier to be angry than to trust, so by learning how to trust others you are less likely to direct your anger at them.*
9. *Good listening skills improve communication and can facilitate trusting feelings between people. This trust can help you deal with potentially hostile emotions; reducing and possibly eliminating them.*
10. *Learn how to assert yourself. This is a constructive alternative to aggression. When you find yourself angry at another person, try to explain to them what is bothering you about their behavior and why. It takes more words and work to be assertive than it does to let your anger show, but the rewards are worth it.*
11. *If you live each day as if it were your last, you will realize that life is too short to get angry over everything.*
12. *The final step requires forgiving those who have angered you. By letting go of the resentment and relinquishing the goal of retribution, you'll find the weight of anger lifted from your shoulders.*